CHAPTER IV

Characteristics of Swift's Poetry:
themes, styles, Verse, etc.

"To you the Muse this Verse bestows,
Which might as well have been in Prose;
No Thought, no Fancy, no Sublime,
But simple Topicks told in Rime."

Theme:
We will now go into the study of the characteristics of Swift’s poetry with regard to themes, style, verse, etc. and in this transition from form to matter our admiration for his poetry increases, for Swift shows as much variety in his form as he shows in themes. Here again we will observe that it is really difficult to group his poems thematically, for one group often slides into another. What starts on a personal note often develops into a matter of general and public importance.

As in the last chapter we will go first to the early pindoric odes and heroic verses where praise or panegyric

1 To Mr. Delany, p. 158, ll. 9-12.
Charity or doing good, fortitude, and justice are the mainsprings of the earliest poem *Ode to the King, On his Irish Expedition*. To set off the transcendent merits of William, Swift opposes him both to James II and Louis XIV. The seven stanzas of the poem are focussed upon the benevolence of William III and his courageous generalship at the battle of the Boyne. Swift denounces the sloth of the English people and the bigotry of the Scottish, who opposed William. He makes much play with the stereotype antithesis between 'great' and 'good': Louis XIV may seem great, but actually is not, Swift seems to tell, because he is bad and tyrannical. William is truly great because he uses his power for good of the people.

Swift's ethical fervour becomes outspoken in the *Ode to the Athenian Society*. While revisiting Ireland and again at Oxford, he had heard about an extraordinary publication called the *Athenian Mercury*. It was professedly the journal of an anonymous group of learned men, comparable to the Royal Society. In the opening stanzas, Swift is describing the end of the late war, his recent arrival in England, and his joy upon discovering the society, with inconsistent imagery. The precarious position of the 'great unknown, and far excelled men' who compose the society is
then described and enlarged upon. True fame, which is far above all reward, is, in this age, only known in these far-exalted men. In the closing stanza the satirist foretells the ruin that will mark the final, triumphant progress of pedantry through the land:

"And thus undoubtedly'twill fare,
With what unhappy Men shall dare,
To be Successors to these Great Unknown,
On Learning's high-establish'd Throne.
Censure, and Pedantry, and Pride,
Numberless Nations, stretching far and wide,
Shall (I foresee it) soon with Gothick Swarms come forth From Ignorance's Universal North,
And with blind Rage break all this peaceful Government.
Yet shall these Traces of your Wit remain
Like a just Map to tell the vast Extent
Of Conquest in your short and Happy Reign;
And to all future Mankind shew
How strange a Paradox is true,
That Men, who liv'd and dy'd without a Name,
Are the chief Heroes in the sacred List of Fame."²


In it, for once at least, the satiric intensity has enforced direct statement and firm rhythm. It is Swift's first passage
in any way to be touched by the power which he was later
to command at will.

The Ode to Sir William Temple is made up of several
successive themes, the dominant and recurrent one being
eulogy of a man too eminent in virtue to come off success-
fully in the world. In the opening stanza Temple is called
upon to discover and conquer the Terra Incognita of virtue.
It is a clumsy way of saying that Temple is a model of
taste, his mind untouched by academic dry-rot, perceptions
sharpened by world experience, the ethical sense alive
to realities. Then in the immediately following stanzas,
the poet turns from praise of patron to exposure of his
own erstwhile companions in Trinity College. Afterwards
a new theme is introduced, and Temple's diplomatic work in
behalf of peace is celebrated. Then as the contrast emerges
between the imposing exterior and the meanness concealed
behind; the verse again, becomes satirical:

"Great God! (said I) what have I seen!
On what poor Engines move
The Thoughts of Monarchs, and Designs of States,
What petty Motives rule their Fates!
How the Mouse makes the mighty Mountain shake.
The mighty Mountain labours with its birth,
Away the frightened Peasants fly,
Scar'd at th' unheard-of Prodigy,
Expect some great gigantick Son of Earth,
    Lo, it appears!
See, how they tremble! how they quake!
Out starts the little Beast, and mocks their idle Fears."

The Ode to Dr. William Sancroft discloses the broad-
ening of a positive concept. There are two realms, one of
Eternal Truth; the other of mundane affairs. Such is the
distance separating them that in this inferior world of
ours the image of Truth shows itself only dimly. But within
our world a second dualism is exhibited. On the one hand
is the small company of rational men like Sancroft, who alone
cause Truth to appear this side - the Eternal realm. In
contrast are the vast numbers of mistaken idiots, for ever
deprived of light, led blindly by opinion. This essentially,
is the central concept of the Ode, though part of it is
expressed vaguely and part by implication alone. It is
Sancroft's position regarding the independence of the Church
which Swift praises here:

"Since, happy Saint, since it has been of late
    Either our blindness or our fate,
To lose the providence of thy cares,
Pity a miserable Church's tears,

That begs the powerful blessing of thy pray'rs.
Some angle say, what were the nation's crimes,
That sent these wild reformers to our times;
Say what their senseless malice meant,
To tear Religion's lovely face;
Strip her of ev'ry ornament and grace,
In striving to wash off th'imaginary paint:"

The same theme, it may be noted here, is later enlarged
upon in the story of the three brothers in A Tale of a Tu£.

The poem To Mr. Congreve was intended to go with
any play by Congreve, and Swift hoped it would accompany
the current one The Double Dealer, if that should prosper
on the stage before going for print.

The beginning is a scene between the Muse and Swift.
She scolds him for treating her like a cast mistress when
he sends her to praise Congreve. The present inspiration
nevertheless bespeaks her divinity, since only a goddess
could bridge the gulf between the dramatist and himself;
and only Congreve's talent could extract such a tribute
from the insulated spirit.

In the next part (lines 49-108) he takes up the

crowd of bad poets and critics, who are separated from him as sharply as he from Congreve (though this parallel may be unconscious). Two prongs of attack are then used—first, that they pick up bits of Congreve's wit to supply their own defects; then that they find fault with Congreve in order to hide their own inferiority.

Illustrating what he means, Swift tells, in the third part, of a Farnham boy who went from school to London and soon came back with all the manners of the town, showing off his familiarity with Dryden, Wycherley, and Congreve. At this point Swift is free not only to indulge in a private discontent but at the same time to express admiration for a friend. As he describes and then flays the boy, one cannot help suspecting that his irritation is stronger than the occasion calls for.

In the next sixty lines remaining, Swift's tone is more evasive. On the surface he seems to say how much luckier he is than Congreve. There is a marked individuality in the poem though Cowley's influence is still noticeable.

There is a poem, as we have noted in the last chapter, named *A Description of Mother Ludwell's Cave* in Joseph Horrell's edition of the *Collected Poems of Jonathan Swift*. It anticipates the style, themes, and subject-matter of Swift's heroic verse. As a specis of 'local poetry' it is
indebted to Cooper's Hill, which saves its author partially in the Battle of the Books. Mother Ludwell's Cave, one of the natural wonders of Surrey, was adjacent to Moor Park, and it is said, Swift often visited it for inspiration. In any case neither Harold Williams nor Herbert Davis has included it in their edition of Swift's poetry.

The last of the early poems, *Occasioned by Sir William Temple's Late Illness and Recovery*, is the shortest and the best of the series. Though this piece is a fairly close imitation of Cowley's *The Complaint*, it is based upon an idea from Temple's essay - *Of Poetry*: "True poetry being dead, an apparition of it walked about". The form is again heroic couplets, and some of the lines reveal a new vein of earnest, powerful conceits:

"Whether in time, deduction's broken chain
Meets, and salutes her sister link again;
Or hunted fancy, by a circling flight,
Comes back with joy to its own seat at night;
Or whether dead imagination's ghost
Oft hovers where alive it haunted most;
Or if thought's rolling globe her circle run,
Turns up old objects to the soul her sun;"

In the first half the muse appears and scolds Swift for not celebrating (in verse) Temple's return from illness. Her speech rather ingeniously contains what might be called a poem-within-a-poem, or the true discussion of the avowed subject. For she recites here the only lines directly relating to Temple's disease, which occupy no more than a fifth of the whole poem; and even these Verses actually describe neither the attack nor the recovery. On the other hand it relates the fears of Lady Temple, Lady Giffard, and the inferior members of the household (lines 37-66).

The poet's answer makes the rest of the poem. Instead of responding to her appeal, he confounds the muse. In this extraordinary reply he does not even mention Temple's illness; on the other hand, he attacks the goddess for encouraging him to hope for fame and esteem where there was no chance of either. He lists the rules which she has urged him to use, and labels them madness. She has tricked him by pretending that virtue and talent will find their reward. A 'right woman' would waste no time upon one so doomed as he. Her advice has led him to frustration as her hopes were delusive; she was herself a 'walking vapour'. All his efforts to please (i.e. we may assume to please Temple) have met with 'contempt where thou hast hop'd esteem'? Finally, he points out that she herself is only an illusion; by renouncing her,

7 Ibid., p. 12, l.146.
therefore, he destroys her with those memorable concluding lines:

"And since thy essence on my breath depends,
Thus with a puff the whole delusion ends."

Giving up poetry, he therefore dismisses and annihilates the vision.

One aspect of these early compositions is this that they bear out Swift's position at Moor Park and his attitude towards Temple. It is not enough to say that only forced and empty compliments are expressed in Ode to Sir William and Occasioned by Sir William Temple's Late Illness and Recovery. The entire group of these early poems must be taken together, and when they are, it is clear to what degree Swift is conscious of his spiritual independence. More than that, he is responsive to the new environment and comes to centre his concept of taste in Temple.

It is probably safe to date the beginning of Swift's extraordinary transformation from the moment late in 1693 when with a puff the whole delusion ended. Shortly thereafter he is on his way back to Dublin, he takes orders, and for a year and more at Kilroot tastes life in an Ulster parish. When he returns to Moor Park it is not to write clumsy verse but, as Ricardo Quintana says, "to fashion

8.Ibid. p.42, ll. 153-54."
prose satire which speaks to Polly's children in a tone
unheard since the days of Erasmus. 9

The year 1698 marks a great turn in Swift's literary
career, for in this year his poetical silence was broken
with a poem Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table – Book which
was followed by a number of poems. The change in verse-
style, form and themes not only provide Dryden's alleged
observation "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet" false,
but also gave Swift fame as a poet. This manifest differences
between the early group of poems and the mature verses are
clearly visible although it is possible, as George Hill
suggests "to detect a thread of continuity". 10

Swift's mature poems are fairly extensive in themes,
"and may be arranged", as Ricardo Quintana has formulated,
"under three heads of compositions of public interest,
personal verses, and literary pieces" 11 with some necessary
adjustments.

A few metrical compositions of public interest of
which we shall presently speak were all occasioned by events.

9 The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift. London: Methuen,
1953, p.45.

10 "Jonathan Swift. The Poetry of Reaction" in the book

11 The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift. London: Methuen,
1953, p.276.
in England. Of these the earliest (attributed to Swift by Sir Walter Scott, but not included in Herbert Davis's edition of Swift's Poetical Works) is A Wicked Treasonable Libel which was written about 1721 in response to the rumour that King George was on the point of securing a divorce in order to marry his mistress, the duchess of Kendal. The sentiments expressed in the Libel and the phrasing are thoroughly Swiftian, as the few opening lines will show:

"While the king and his ministers keep such a pother,
And all about changing one whore for another,
Think I to myself what need all this strife,
His majesty first had a whore of a wife,
And surely the difference mounts to no more
Than, now he has gotten a wife of whore" 12

The Duke of Marlborough died on 16th June, 1722. Swift was neither magnanimous enough to remain at least silent on that occasion nor to conceal his judgements behind the conventional reticences. In A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a late famous General he reiterated the charges which he had levelled at Marlborough in the days of the queen, closing with six powerful lines on the fall of Pride:

"Come hither, all ye empty things,
Ye bubbles rais'd by breath of Kings;"

Who float upon the tide of state,
Come hither, and behold your fate.
Let pride be taught by this rebuke,
How very mean a thing's a Duke;
From all his ill-got honours flung,
Turn'd to that dirt from whence he sprung." 13

To the same year belongs the poem Upon the horrid
Plot discovered by Harlequin - Swift's scoffing commentary
on the government's proceedings against his friend, Bishop
Atterbury, recently accused of implication in a plot to
restore the pretender.

Finally, we will see the Verses on the Revival of
the Order of the Bath. The last couplet of this short
satirical piece:

"And he who will leap over a Stick for the King
Is qualified best for a Dog in a String." 14

anticipated the account in Gulliver's Travels, Book I,
chapter iii, of the trial of dexterity which the Lilli­
putian candidates for the coloured silken threads were
forced to undergo.

Of the personal poems, by all odds the most

interesting one is the piece Cadenus and Vanessa. This famous poem gives, in a mock-classical setting, Swift's account of his acquaintance with Hester Vanhomirigh (Vanessa) and of his surprise and distress at finding her in love with him. Vanessa, who scorns fops and fine ladies, meets, at length, the Dean:

"Grown old in Politicks and Wit;
Caress'd by Ministers of State,
Of half Mankind the Dread and Hate."15

His fame had led her to forget his age; but he does not understand what love is; his feelings are those of a father and a tutor. After a time, he finds that her thoughts wander, and, at length, she confesses that "his lessons have—"

".......... found the weakest Part,
Aim'd at the Head, but reach'd the Heart." 16

Cadenus is ashamed and surprised. He knows that the world will blame him, especially as she has 'five thousand guineas in her purse'. But Vanessa argues well, and, to his grief and shame, Cadenus can scarce oppose her. After all it is flattering to be preferred to a crowd of beaux. He tells her that it is too late for him to love, but he offers

16 Ibid., p.130, Ll.622-23.
friendship, gratitude and esteem. Vanessa takes him at his word, and says that she will be the tutor. What success she has "Is to the world a Secret yet"; whether he descend to 'less Seraphick Ends' or whether they decide to 'temper love and books together' must not be told.

It is pleasant to turn from the verses about Vanessa to the prayers Swift wrote year by year on Stella's birthday.

It was Swift's habit, beginning in 1719, to celebrate Stella's birthdays, which fell on 13 March, in verse. We have in all, seven of the birthday poems, the series coming to an end in 1727 and being broken in 1720 and 1726. If there is anywhere a key to the enigmatic relations between Swift and Stella, it lies in these extraordinary occasional pieces, very much like Shakespeare's Sonnet sequence where he is supposed to have unlocked his heart. These poems have sometimes been called love poems and again poems of friendship. But actually they embody emotions too subtle and complicated to be accurately described in conventional terms. Insistently Swift dwells upon Stella's progressive physical deterioration, and in contrast upon her qualities of mind and character, which

17 Ibid., 135, L. 819.
18 Ibid., 135, L. 823
19 Ibid., 135, L. 825.
remain untouched by advancing years. In the poem for 1721 he writes:

"Now, this is Stella's Case in Fact;
And Angel's Face, a little crack't;
(Could Poets or could Painters fix
How Angels look at thirty six)
This drew us in at first to find
In such a Form an Angel's Mind
And ev'ry Virtue now supplies
The fainting Rays of Stella's Eyes;" 20

A similar strain is found in the poem for 1725:

"No Length of Time can make you quit
Honour and Virtue, Sense and Wit,
Thus you may still be young to me,
While I can better hear than see;
Oh, ne'er may Fortune shew her Spight,
To make me deaf, and mend my Sight." 21

Elsewhere, as in To Stella Visiting me in my Sickness, which in 1720 took the place of a birthday poem, Swift dwelt upon her courage, for it appears that she scorned to affect feminine fears. Here is an expression of Swift's

21 Stella's Birth-day, 1725. p. 293, Ll. 49-54.
true attitude towards women, which, despite certain passages in his works, was a noble and generous one. Unlike the majority of the great satirists, Swift did not look upon woman as a flagitious and inferior being. To him woman was man's equal, contemptible only when she assumed conventional feminine role and laid reason aside for wiles and affected airs. When Swift browbeat the women of his acquaintance, it was to make them act like the rational beings that he assumed they were. But he had no need to browbeat Stella, who from the Moor Park days had received the imprint of his own mind and whose every word and action were worthy of her teacher.

In To Stella who collected and Transcribed his poems, Swift glories in the fact that theirs is a relationship existing in defiance of all the laws of romance:

"Thou Stella wert no longer young,
When first for thee my Harp I strung:
Without one Word of Cupid's Darts,
Of killing Eyes, or bleeding Hearts:
With Friendship and Esteem possesst,
I ne'er admitted Love a Guest." 22

Here the Iscrubby poet is deluded by a fleeting glimpse of some Chloe, Sylvia, Phillis, or Iris into imagining the

damself to be a paragon of beauty, and proceeds to translate
his delusion into romantic verse. But sooner or later comes
the cruel awakening when he discovers Chloe tippling with
footmen, Sylvia an inmate of Bridewell, Phillis mending her
ragged smocks, or Iris disfigured by disease. It is only
true poets who can look quite through the false beauty at
the surface to the inner reality.

We must not miss to include in this thematic group
the famous poem Verses on the death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.
The poem, with its mixture of humour, egotism and pathos,
is, in many respects, the best and most interesting of
Swift's verse. Swift begins with comments on our dislike
to be excelled by our friends. Then he pictures his own
imaginary coming death and what his acquaintances would say
of him—his vertigo, loss of memory, oft told stories,
which could be borne only by younger folk, for the sake of
his wine. At last, their prognostications came true: the
dean was dead. But who was his heir? When it was known he
had left all to public uses, people said that this was mere
envy, avarice and pride. The town was cloyed with elegies,
and Curè (the most famous bookseller) prepared to:

"...treat me as he does my Betters.
Publish my Will, my Life, my Letters.
Revive the Libels born to dye:
Which Pope must bear, as well as I." 23.

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Friends shrugged their shoulders, and said "I'm sorry; but we all must dye". Ladies received the news, over their cards, "in doleful dumps":

"The Dean is dead, (and what is Trumps?)
' Then Lord have Mercy on his Soul.
'(Ladies I'll venture for the Vale)
' Six Deans they say must bear the Pall.
'(I wish I knew what King to call)"

In a year, he was forgotten; his wit became out of date. But, sometimes, men at a club would refer to him and discuss his character. This gives Swift the opportunity for a defence of himself. He had aimed at curing the vices of mankind by grave irony: 'What he wit was all his own'. He never quoted men of rank, nor was he afraid of the great. He helped those in distress, and chose only the good and wise for friends, 'Fair liberty was all his cry'. He valued neither power nor wealth. He laboured in vain to reconcile his friends in power, and, finally, left the court in despair. In Ireland, he defeated Wood: and

"Thought Fools their Int'rest how to know: And gave them Arms to ward the Blow."
But now the poet realizes that—

"Perhaps I may allow, the Dean
Had too much Satyr in his Vein;
And seem'd determin'd not to starve it,
Because no Age could more deserve it.
Yet, Malice never was his Aim;
He lash'd the Vice but spar'd the Name." 29

In this poem as well as in An Apology to the Lady Carteret and Lady Acheson Weary of the Dean, Swift shows that, as a poet, he could represent personal predicaments emblematically and turn private crisis into public example.

We may end this group of poems with The Day of Judgement that was found among his papers in his own handwriting, after his death. It describes the Last Day, with the world trembling before Jove's throne, and then gives very aptly the epilogue to the whole comedy of life:

"Offending Race of Human Kind,
By Nature, Reason, Learning, blind;
You who thro' Frailty step'd aside,
And you who never fell - thro' Pride;
You who in different Sects have shamm'd,
And come to see each other damn'd;

29 Ibid., p.512, ll.459-64."
(So some Folks told you, but they knew
No more of Jove's Designs than you)
The World's mad Business now is o'er,
And I resent these Pranks no more.
I to such Blockheads set my Wit!
I damn such Fools! - Go, go, you're hit! 30

Of the literary poems we may take up first Phyllis,
or _the Progress of Love_. It was written in 1716, and as the
reference in the closing lines shows, Swift was still living
in the glorious past. Here we get the inn at Staines, where
Phyllis and her husband are seen as landlord and hostess.
This inn lay on the road between London and Windsor, and
must have been passed countless times by Swift as he made
the journey in Oxford's or Bolingbroke's Company. At the
beginning of the tale Phyllis is a perfect prude, blushing
with stimulated modesty whenever a man looks at her. At
length a lucky suitor wins her, but after the completion
of all arrangements for the wedding Phyllis's modesty departs
and that very night she runs away with John the butler.
Their money gone, Phyllis first pawns her trinkets and is
at last reduced to selling her virtue.

Next we may consider the poem _The Progress of Poetry_.
It is in many ways superior to the Verses on Phyllis, and

though completely outdistanced by a later and better piece
On Poetry - A Rapsody, is worthy to stand as an envoy to
the Letter to a Young Poet. "The Farmer's Goose ..........,
Has fed without Restraint or Trouble", and hence does not
cackle. But turned out to graze 'round the barren common
strays', she grows lank and spare with 'Hard Exercise,
and harder Fare'. Before long she is flying over the
parish, singing harmoniously as she wings her way. Such
is the case with the poet. RePete, he is good for nothing,
but let him starve and his powers increase in proportion
to his hunger:

"With good Roast Beef his Belly full,
Grown lazy, foggy, fat, and dull.
Deep sunk in Plenty, and Delight,
What Poet e'er could take his Flight?
Or stuff'd with Phlegm up to the Throat,
What Poet e'er could sing a Note? "

But,

"With hungry Meals his Body pin'd,
His Guts and Belly full of Wind;
And, like a Jockey for a Race,
His Flesh brought down to Flying-Case;
Now his exalted Spirit loaths
Incumbrances of Food and Cloaths;

32 Ibid., 179, L.10. 33 Ibid., 179, L.11
34 Ibid., 179, L.21-26
And up he rises like a Vapour,
Supported high on Wings of Paper;
He singing flies, and flying sings,
While from below all Grub-street rings."

A true poet's task is really a hard one. He is careless of fame and position. The same theme recurs again very clearly in To Stella, who collected and Transcribed his poems.

"True Poets can depress and raise;
Are Lords of Infamy and Praise;
They are not scurrilous in Satire,
Nor will in Panygyrick flatter.
Unjustly Poets we asperse;
Truth shines the brighter, clad in Verse;
And all the Fictions they pursue
Do but insinuate what is true."

On Poetry: A Rapsody has often been admired as Swift's best poem. It is true that no other shows both his wit and humour to better advantage. In this powerful poem, Swift describes the difficulty of the poet's art, and the wane of public encouragement. After much satirical advice, he tells the writer who has had to put aside all thought.

of fame to seek support for a party:

"From Party-Merit seek Support;
The vilest Verse thrives best in Court.
A Pamphlet in Sir Bob's Defence
Will never fail to bring in Pence;" 37

The argument continues in the poem: Praise of a King will always be acceptable, and, with change of names, will serve again in the following reign. Or, the poet may live by being a puny judge of wit at Will's. He must read Rymer and Dennis, and Dryden's prefaces, now much valued,

"Tho' merely writ at first for filling
To raise the Volume's Price, a Shilling" 38

Jobbers in the poet's art were to be found in every alley, generally at war with each other. As naturalists have observed a flea

"Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey,
And these have smaller yet to bite 'em,
And so proceed ad infinitum." 39

Who can reach the worst in Grub Street?

38 Ibid., p. 576, ll. 253-54.
"From bad to worse and worse they fall,
But who can reach to Worst of all?
For, tho' in Nature Depth and Height
Are equally held infinite,
In Poetry the Height we know;
'Tis only infinite below."  

And then the poem ends with satirical adulation of King and minister, such as poetasters loved. The poem is too complicated and difficult to follow. Some of the 'rapidity' of his thought is due to the variety of subjects he traverses, like converging spokes of a wheel, so as to reach his goal from several different directions. Swift's major poems usually bring together all his interests of the moment. On Poetry draws upon his unpublished Directions for Making a Birthday-Song, a much more direct assault in the 'instructions' fashion started by Marvell's parody of Waller. It takes its ostensible theme from The Beasts Confession, though Swift treats half a dozen other subjects than how men mistake their talents. Its political satire relates it to poems - A Libel on Dr. Delany and a certain Great Lord, A Panegyric on the Rev. Dean, Swift ("I chose to abuse myself with the direct reverse of my character")  

In another literary piece - *A Love Song in the Modern Taste* all the usual tricks have been exposed - the ornamental epithet, the classical references, the personification, the alliteration, the sing-song lilt, the unreal language, the sentimental commonplaces, and all the dreary staleness of these false, imitated political devices:

IV

"Cynthia, tune harmonious Numbers; Fair Discretion string the Lyre; Sooth [e] my ever-walking Slumbers: Bright Apollo lend thy Choir.

V

Gloomy Pluto, King of Terrors, Arm'd in adamantine Chains, Lead me to the Chrystal Mirrors, Wat'ring soft Elysian Plains." 42

Another group under the title "Miscellaneous" is to be added to the list in order to contain such poems as *Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table-Book, The Furniture of a Woman's Mind, The Humble Petition of Francis Harris, The Description of a Salamander, The History of Vanbrug's House, The Story of Baucis and Philemon, Apollo outwitted, On Dreams, A*

Description of the Morning, A Description of a City Shower etc. Themes of some of these poems have already been discussed in the preceding chapters and some of them will recur later either in this or in the following Chapters. In any case, some of the poems of this group merit special appraisal of their characteristic themes and the poet's handling of them.

Among these poems of the "Miscellaneous group" we need first to go to a couple of poems with identical themes. They are On Dreams and A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed. There is the same suggestion that dreams are in strict accord with the nature of the dreamer:

"Those Dreams that on the silent Night intrude,
And with false flitting Shades our Minds delude,
Jove never sends us downward from the Skies,
Nor can they from infernal Mansions rise;
But all are mere Productions of the Brain,
And Fools consult Interpreters in vain." 43

Similarly in the case of an artificial lady, who is unburdening all her artificial ornaments which are actually her beauties:

43 On Dreams - an Imitation of Petronius, p. 266
Lî. 1-6.
"Or, if she chance to close her Eyes,
Of Bridewell and the Compter dreams,
And feels the Lash, and faintly screams;
Or, by a faithless Bully drawn,
At some Hedge-Tavern lies in Pawn;"  p. 44

The only difference between the dream and the reality is that in the dream-world we pursue our evil desires with impunity whereas in society, there are a few obstacles in our way. This tension between the real world, where our corruptions are at least held at bay, and the dream world, in which we live as viciously as our desires, accounts for the weight of Swift's satire. Dreams, in fact, represented a mode of life he detested very much.

Like later poems on Vanbrugh and Patridge, The Description of a Salamander is a species of sheer wit in the manner of the 'metaphysical conjectures' of the Tale of a Tub.

Lord Cutts got the name 'Salamander' for his bravery under fire at Namur. But Swift has here employed his wit to denote his vices and follies. The motive of Swift's vicious attack on Cutts - the then Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, however, is not known.

44 A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed, p.518, Ll. 40-44.
The theme of *The History of Vanbrugh's House* and that of *The Beasts Confessions* is the same: "Men mistake their talents. Swift in his characteristic manner ridicules the playwright Vanbrugh by way of describing the miniscule origins of his architectural designs at Whitehall and Blenheim:

"But Raillery, for once, apart,  
If this Rule holds in ev'ry Art,  
Or if his Grace were no more skil'd in  
The Art of battering Walls, than building,  
We might expect to find next Year  
A Mousetrap-man chief Engineer." 45

**Style:**

No right assessment of Swift's style of poetry is possible without taking first into consideration Coleridge's inimitable observations:

"Swift's style is, in its line, perfect, the manner is the complete expression of the matter, the terms appropriate, and the artifice concealed. It is simplicity in the true sense of the word." 46

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45 *The History of Vanbrugh's House* - p. 61, ll. 43-48.  
It is also interesting to note that dominant qualities of Swift's style - lucidity, impretentiousness, rigorous economy - are so obvious that attempts of critics to generalise upon them have a conspicuous sameness. This can be very easily manifested by comparing Coleridge's above observation with those of the older critics right from Swift's own age.

We can start with Dr. Samuel Johnson's words:

"In the Poetical works of Dr. Swift there is not much upon which the critic can exercise his powers. They are often humorous, almost always light, and have the qualities which recommend such compositions, easiness and gaiety. They are, for the most part, what their author intended. The diction is correct, the numbers are smooth, and the rhymes exact. There seldom occurs a hard-laboured expression, or a redundant epithet; all his verses exemplify his own definition of a good style, they consist of proper words in proper places."47

and end with Thackeray's:

"..... his statement is elaborately simple; he shuns tropes and metaphors, and uses his ideas and words with a wise thrift and economy, as he used his money; with which he could be generous and splendid upon great occasions, but which he husbanded when there was no need to spend it. He never indulges in needless extravagance of

Rhetoric, lavish epithets, profuse imagery. He lays his opinion before you with a grave simplicity and a perfect neatness."\(^48\)

Clarity seems to play a major role in the style of Swift's writings and its importance lies in the positive avoidance of whatever is affected, unnecessary, or banal. The inimitable clarity of his writing is not fully due to his superlative talent. It is also a product of a sustained awareness, on the one hand, and on the other, of an awakening conception of human reality to which any literary quality except utmost clarity would be alien.

Again the appearance of effortlessness in his writing is entirely genuine. He does not search for words, images, or metaphors on grounds other than their immediate utility for his purpose. He is a grand master of familiar style. The quest for novelty, allusiveness and connotative richness in language is alien to his conception of the poet's or writer's art and hence is the object of repeated and contemptuous attention in his parody. His "concealed artifice" is contained within the total context of passages or entire works and rarely in single words or images. The obvious exceptions to the above observations about Swift's unaffected poetic style are to be found in the four pindaric odes and

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two or three other succeeding verses in heroic couplets which are the product of his years in Sir William Temple's household.

Swift had come upon the familiar style while yet at Moor Park, and his lines in Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table-Book are convincing in this regard. From this point on his progress in the familiar style was triumphant. To mention only productions of outstanding importance: first came Mrs. Harris's Petition, a few years later Vaubrug's House and The Story of Jaucis and Philemon. His association beginning early in 1708 with the Addisonian circle resulted in the polishing and refinement of the familiar style which are to be seen in the revised versions of the last two poems. "But as it happens", Ricardo Quintana rightly opines, "the original versions of these two pieces are much more to modern taste than the later versions exhibiting Addisonian correctness and polish" 49

A Description of a City Shower, Cadenus and Vanessa, and The Author Upon Himself are the superb compositions in familiar style. The first is a companion to the earlier A Description of the Morning, and like it was designed to parody current fashion. The approaching storm is first

described:

"Careful Observers may fortel the Hour
(By sure Prognosticks) when to dread a Show'r;
While Rain depends, the pensive Cat gives o'er
Her Frolicks, and pursues her Tail no more."50

which may be compared with Dryden's Virgil:

"And that by certain signs we may presage
Of Heats and Rains, and Wind's impetuous rage,
The Sov'reign of the Heav'ns has set on high
The Moon, to mark the Changes of the Skies; ....

The Crow with clam'rous Cries the Show'r demands,
And single stalks along the Desart Sands.
The nightly Virgin, while her Wheel she plies,
Foresees the Storm impending in the Skies".51

and then are depicted the town scenes as the downpour drives
the passers-by to shelter:

"To Shops in Crouds the dagled Famales fly,
Pretend to cheapen Goods, but nothing buy.
The Templer spruce, while ev'ry Spout's a-broach,
Stays till'tis fair, yet seems to call a Coach.
The tuck'd-up Sempstress walks with hasty Strides,
While Streams run down her oil'd Umbrella's Sides.

50 A Description of a City Shower, p.91, ll. 1-4.
Here various Kinds by various Fortunes led,
Commence Acquaintance underneath a Shed."

Now from all Parts the swelling Kennels flow,
And bear their Trophies with them as they go:
Filth of all Hues and Odours seem to tell
What Streets they sail'd from, by the Sight and Smell"

As in A Description of the Morning, Swift in this poem looks at London from the opposite of the common points of view. He handles it as a rural landscape. The obvious model for verse descriptions of agricultural prospects was Virgil's Georgics, nicely translated by Dryden. Swift therefore makes his new poem into a mock-Georgic, even as A Description of the Morning had constituted a mock-pastoral. While the images come from Swift's direct experience of London - including the foul smells in his lodgings - the form and the style remind the readers of great storm in the first Georgic.

The charm of many of Swift's poems like Stella at Wood-Park, An Apology to the Lady Carteret, The Journal of a Modern Lady lies in nuances of speech which we unhesitatingly accept as authentic without other evidence than they provide:

"Then to her Glass; and "Betty, pray
"Don't I look frightfully to Day?"

52 A Description of the City Shower, p.92, Ll.33-40, p.93, Ll. 53-56.
"But, was it not confounded hard?

"Well, if I ever touch a Card:

"Four Mattadores; and lose Codill!

"Depend upon't, I never will.

"But run to Tom, and bid him fix

"The Ladies here to Night by Six". 53

The first two lines at once call to mind Pope's similar lines in Epistle to Cobham:

"One would not, sure, be frightful when one is dead —
And-Betty—give this Cheek a little Red" 54

It is more remarkable that he should have so often caught the accents of real speech in his short lines:

"Madam, the Goldsmith waits below,
He says, his Business is to know
If you'll redeem the Silver Cup
He keeps in Pawn? — Why, shew him up" 55

Indeed, Swift's finest poems are remarkable achievements of style: his handling of tone, for instance, is never random or awkward. A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a late Famous General is a case in point. Marlborough died on 30th

53 The Journal of a Modern Lady, p.375, Ll. 48-55.
December 1711, when he was deprived of all appointments, an event celebrated in Swift's *The Fable of Midas*. The Elegy reads:

"His Grace! impossible! What dead!
Of old age too, and in his bed!
And could that Mighty Warrior fall?
And so inglorious, after all!" 56

The elegiac genre is mocked; its skeleton retained for the purpose. The form of the poem enacts the burial arrangements as if to make the reported death doubly sure. The poem begins in astonishment; registering the receipts of news by one who is merely surprised to hear it. Swift begins the corresponding part as if solemnity might be in question: "Behold his funeral appears" 56a. Pursuing this line, he makes an abrupt change to the colloquial: 'But what of that, his friends may say'; until the general is condemned by his wretched advocates. The solemn note is admitted, only to enrich the mockery. In Swift as well as in Pope we are to watch an action: "Behold". An instance of it we have found in the foregoing lines from Swift's poem. The same example may be

56 A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a Late Famous General p.228, ll. 1-4.
56a Ibid., p. 228, ll. 17-7 _
56b Ibid., p. 228, l. 21.
cited from Pope's famous scene of cutting of a tuff of hair in The Rape of the Lock with mock serious urgency:

"The peer now spreads the glittering for sex wide,
To inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.
Even then, before the fatal engine closed,
A wretched sylph too fondly interpose;
Fate urged the shears, and cut the sylph in twain
(But airy substance soon unites again)
The meeting points the sacred hair dissemble:
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!"57

The style is the man, and Swift, for all the complications of his nature, its contradictions and contrariety, was a plain man. He hated affectation, insincerity, obsequiousness, as well as injustice and corruption. That he had learned to hate them the hardest way, by being their victim, strengthens his passion and conviction. Paul Fussell58 finds even the word 'exactly' has been used with high irony in The Progress of Beauty where, after drawing a comically crude analogy between the Moon and 'rotting' Celia, Swift asserts with a straight face:

"Twixt earthly Femals and the Moon
All Parallells exactly run;
If Celia should appear too soon
Alas, the Nymph would be undone." 59

These ironic 'exactly's like 'infallibly's' constitute
a sort of adverbial mock-logic, which Swift offers as a mani-
fe斯坦ion of the depraved human tendency to transform the
complex and the subtle into the simple and, therefore, the
mechanical". 60

"His method as stylist and Satirist", writes Martin
Price, "are devices for dissociating the apparent from the
real, and the dissociation is made only to prepare us giving the
real its proper residence in, and control over, appear-
rance. It is all important that man should see clearly, should
detect the serpent in the brass, on the one hand, or the
timeless law in the temporal occasion, on the other". 61

Swift's poems are not adorned with gems of expression
inviting admiration. The style never draws attention to itself
and is accordingly the more effective. We are always interested
in what Swift says and never distracted by the way in which
he says it.

60 Paul Fussell : The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism
This, of course, is paradoxically due to the excellence of his style. These are the qualities of Swift's style of writings that have been summed up in James Reeves' lines:

"At their best his poems are almost daring in their naturalness, their simplicity and their clarity...." 62

For these characteristics of his style, Swift's verse reads aloud admirably. The ear is always satisfied, never glutted.

Verse:

As in case of Swift's style we will gain a great deal of knowledge about the characteristics of his verse if we borrow the opinions of the great critics of the past, which are equally applicable in case of his prose and verse. We may note first of all some lines from Dr. Samuel Johnson:

"In his (Swift's) works is found a equal tenor of easy language, which rather trickles than flows. His delight was in simplicity. That he has in his works no metaphor, as has been said, is not true; but his few metaphors seem to be received rather by necessity than choice. He studied purity; and though perhaps all his strictures are not exact, yet it is not often that solecisms can be found; and whoever depends on his authority may generally

conclude himself safe. His sentences are never too much dilated or contracted; ...........

His style was well suited to his thoughts, which are never subtilized by nice disquisitions, decorated by conceits, elevated by ambitious sentences, or variegated by far sought learning. He pays no court to the passions; he excites neither surprise nor admiration; he always understands himself; and his reader always understands him: ........ his passage is always on a level, along solid grounds, without asperities, without obstruction" 63

To this opinion of Johnson we may add Sir Walter Scott's:

"As a poet, Swift's poet is pre-eminent in the sort of poetry which he cultivated ....... His powers of versification are admirably adapted to his favourite subjects. Rhyme, which is a handcuff to an inferior poet, he who is master of his art wears as a bracelet. Swift was of the latter description; his lines fall as easily into the best grammatical arrangement, and the most simple and forcible expression, as if he had been writing in prose. The numbers and coincidence of rhymes, always correct and natural, though often unexpected, distinguish the current of his poetical composition, which exhibits, otherwise, no mark of the difficulty with which

All these remarks about Swift's verse are, of course, not applicable to his early ventures in poetry. They include four Pindaric odes in the manner of Cowley written in clumsy and irregular metre and two heroic verses (three - if a Description of Mother Ludwell's Cave is included) written in heroic couplets. Ehrenpreis has nicely described the characteristics of these early poems in an inimitable style:

"Since his (Swift's) themes and values are blamelessly conventional, he is, in his search for freshness of effect, flung upon ingenious hyperbole; and since his language is too weak for the extravagance of his feelings, the outcome is bathos". 65

With the poem To Mr. Congreve, Swift's verificati-

on undergoes its first important structural change in the direction of his eventual style. This change is the replacement of pindarics by heroic couplets. The term heroic couplet describes iambic pentameter lines rime in couplets. It is called the heroic couplet, but this is a misnomer, for the best-known works in this form are not particularly heroic.

Both Henry Wood and George Williamson 67 trace back the

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67 "The Rhetorical Pattern of Neo-classical Wit: contd...
English origin of this metre in Sandys and not Waller, who at the beginning of the third decade of the seventeenth century made a uniform practice of writing in heroic couplets. These were on the whole in accord with the French rule, and which, for exactness of construction and for harmonious versification, go far towards satisfying the demands of the later 'classical' school in England.

Now we will find that even the rigid bindings of the heroic couplets could not hold Swift in check for long. But it was not until the whole delusion had ended with a puff that Swift could move about free of any theoretical shackles as to what poetry might be. Then turning his thoughts some other way he found, and almost immediately mastered, the easy conversational and infinitely flexible octosyllable which he might so much sooner have adopted. We meet it first in the Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table-Book, written probably as early as 1698, during his last fruitful stay with Temple when he was most probably working at A Tale of a Turtle, and could regard his verse as a trifling amusement. The octosyllabic couplet is so named because iambic or trochaic tetrameter contains eight syllables in this form.

It offers a more rapid, terse, and frequently less smooth movement than does the heroic couplet, but it is subject to the same qualifications of end-stop or enjambment.

The piece, in question is imperfect, no doubt, when compared with later ones, which at their best, when they dealt with a larger area of human emotions deserve the name of poetry. But it is lively, and it rings true:

"Here you may read (Dear Charming Saint) Beneath (A new Receipt for Paint) Here in Beau-spelling (trut tel deth) There in her own (far an el breth) Here (lovely Nymph pronounce my doom) There (A safe way to use Perfume) Here, A Page fill'd with Billet Doux; On t'other side (laid out for Shoes) (Madam, I dye without your Grace) (Item, for half a Yard of Lace.)"

The keen observer in Swift has found his weapon; the first term of his apprenticeship is over.

Swift forces the rhymed octosyllabic couplet to serve him as a means of obtaining an effect of perfect spontaneity and ease, a medium of expression even less formal than prose. Perhaps no poem by Swift has been more often

reprinted than his Mrs. Harris's Petition. Yet the form is one which he is known to have used on only one other occasion that is in Marry the Cook-Maid's Letter to Dr. Sheridan. The Petition is in four beat, doggerel couplets, from twelve to twenty-four syllables a line. For its story the poem recites in the first person the petition of a waiting woman employed by Lady Betty, Berkeley's daughter. Through several accidents, Mrs. Harris has lost not only her savings but also the hope of marrying his lordship's Chaplain (i.e., Swift). So she prays the Lords Justices to help her both replenish her purse and recapture the parson. In this, earliest of his 'non-sublime' poems Swift has skilfully adapted the habits of every day speech as no one else yet had done in poetry. Line after line, he draws here a good-natured, comical bathos from the speaker's language, using exact, appropriate, but unpredictable rhymes — Shrewsbury's Goosberries. A feature henceforth characteristic of him as we have seen in Chapter III, is the proverbial turn of phrase and the idiomatic exclamation: "just about the time of Goosberries" 69, "three skips of a House" 70. In a scramble of saws, and colloquialisms, Swift hits off a dozen personalities below and above stairs, including himself. Of all the beauties in the poem the supreme is Swift's use of vulgar

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speech-patterns, the coarse sententiousness of the semi-literate for effects which are funny and decorous at once.

"Tis true, seven Pound, four Shillings, and six Pence, makes a great Hole in my Wages, Besides, as they say, Service is no Inheritance in these Ages". 71

We will now refer to a poem in which, not only the language of the speakers, but their turn of thinking, is imitated with wonderful exactness. The full name of the poem is The Grand Question debated Whether Hamilton's Bawn should be turned into a Barrack or a Malt House. Here the measure is that which is classically called anapaestic, chiefly consisting of feet or portions composed of two short and one long syllable. Next to that of eight syllables, it is the most used for light and humorous topics, and no kind of English verse runs so glibly, or gives so much the air of conversation as we get in the following lines:

"First, let me suppose, I make it a Malt-House.
Here I have computed the Profit will fall thus,
There's nine Hundred Pounds for Labour and Grain,
I increase it to Twelve, so three Hundred remain:
A handsome Addition for Wine and good cheer,
Three Dishes a Day, and three Hogsheads a Year". 72

71 Ibid., p.51, ll. 40-41.
The satire of the poem is mainly directed against the gentlemen of the army, for whom Swift, probably through party possessions, seems always to have entertained both aversions and contempt. It is, however, irresistibly pleasant.

In the description of Mrs. Harris' exact counting of the money stolen from her purse -

"That I went to warm myself in Lady Betty's Chamber because I was cold
And I had in a Purse, seven Pound, four Shillings,
and six Pense besides Farthings, in Money, and Gold".

we can hear already the jingle of Wood's Half pence:

"But when Wood's Brass began to sound,
Guns, Trumpets, Drums, and Bells were drown'd.

and in the colloquial language the homely style of the Drapier's Letters.

In A Description of a City Shower, Swift adapted the current poetic style - to realise description. The concluding part of the poem does not laugh at Dryden as may appear at first instance. Rather, it deflates the high-flying Addisonian imitation of Dryden's style, reducing the subject-matter to

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73 The Humble Petition of Francis Harris, p.49, ll. 1-2.
74 An Epigram on Wood's Brass-Money, p.274, ll.7-8.
its appropriate level - and incidentally it creates an effective poem:

"Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung,

Guts' and Blood,

Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all
drench'd in Mud,

Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come

dtumbling down the Flood." 75

poem

In the A Description of the Morning Swift's use of the adverb 'duly' in the lines -

"The Turnkey now his Flock Returning sees,

Duly let out a Nights to Steal for Fees". 76

"emphasizes", as Murray Krieger remarks, "his awareness of the routine nature of his activity" 77. The bailiffs too react the same way. The poet introduces them just after the returning prisoners-thieves, and introduces them as "watchful"; although, taking their "silent stands", they clearly accept, without judgement or reaction, the routine aspect of what they see.

Mr Krieger continues:

"But, just as the bailiffs do not react to the returning prisoners, none of the couplets interact with one another. This is an ongoing world of autonomous sights and sounds, but a world alive with the responses of a humanity expressing routinely its resistance to its assigned functions."

Again, the slowness of the day to get itself started once more in its common routine is amply reflected in the retarding movement of the final line with its simple, eternal and Shakespearean observation:

"And School-boys lag with Satchels in their Hands."

Whatever elements of satire there may be in its mock-heroic or mock-pastoral rhetorical moments of the poem, there is no hate or anger in it. Rather, there is something close to the affection, the affection of a familiarity, a closeness that yields understanding, as moral judgement - the capacity to condemn - is suspended.

Throughout his career as a poet, Swift liked to design his works, as in The Description of a Salamander, around systematic analogies between a situation immediately presented and a remote parallel drawn from mythology or nature. The

78 Ibid., p. 259.
79 A Description of the Morning, p. 86, L. 18.
bridge between the real and figurative aspects of the analogy is really a play on words; so Swift's peculiar structure tends to be a set of parallels, each illustrating a pun and all based on a far-fetched simile. If the simile happens to be a common place, Swift will often reverse its ordinary implications. The following two stanzas will bear out the above assertion:

"First then, our Author has defin'd
This Reptil, of the Serpent kind,
With gawdy Coat, and shining Train,
But loathsome Spots his Body stain:
Out from some Hole obscure he flies
When Rains descend, and Tempests rise,
Till the Sun clears the Air; and then
Crawls back neglected to his Den.

So when the War has rais'd a Storm
I've seen a Snake in human Form,
All stain'd with Infamy and Vice,
Leap from the Dunghill in a trice,
Burnish and make a gaudy show,
Become a General, Peer and Beau,
Till Peace hath made the Sky serene,
Then shrink into it's Hole again." 80

80 The Description of a Salamander, p. 59, p. 59.
Here is a technique newly developed by Swift to extend an analogy into metamorphosis.

Swift's moral contempt for the Honourable Richard Tighe, a Dublin privy-councillor who not only beat his wife but also uttered vigorous Whig sentiments, takes the shape of a maggot figure in *Dick, A Maggot*, where Dick's undistinguishable maggothood becomes exactly as noisome as a human excrement:

"For, as he shakes his Wains cot Chaps,
Down ev'ry mealy Atom drops
And leaves the Tartar Phiz, in show
Like a fresh Turd just dropt on Snow" 81

In the same way a vigorous part of Swift's campaign against William Wood, the copper-coinage entrepreneur, is conducted by reducing him to the station of vermin. In *Wood, an Insect*, Swift manages symbolically the campaign which, in the *Drapier's Letters*, he conducts discursively. The distinctly different audiences of the poem and the dramatic essays would seem to help dictate the modes of rhetoric. In *Wood, an Insect*, the poet metamorphoses his victim into both a 'Wood-Louse' and a 'Wood-Worm' or a 'Death-watch' Beetle. Just as the sovereign remedy against the 'Death-watch' Beetle is the

application of scalding water, so

"....... since the Drapier hath heartilly maul'd him,
I think the best Thing we can do is to scald him.
For which Operation there's nothing more proper
Than the Liquor he deals in, his own melted Copper;" 82

The eighteenth-century imagination is full of architectural images because on all sides Augustan London was being torn up and built anew. Here and there stone and brick were still being installed to cover the scars left by the Great Fire of 1666, and all London seemed to be a - building. Every body was either building or had friends who were doing the same. Just as a minimum technical knowledge of fortification was assumed in any civilized person, so any member of the middle or upper-class was expected to possess some technical architectural learning. Its influence is noticeable in Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. A building, again, presupposes rooms, and rooms suggest furniture. Hence Swift's poem *The Furniture of a Woman's Mind* tells us that the 'Object' furnishing the room runs from:

"A Set of Phrases learnt by Rote;
A Passion for a Scarlet - Coad;" 83

to

"............... the Trick
At proper Seasons to be sick" 84

Similarly we find a juxtaposition of the architectural and the verminous in Swift's poem Vanbrug's House, where details of stones, beams, slates, tiles, and thatch curiously seem to invite into the poem a host of silkworms, maggots, and flies.

We will bring our discussions on the characteristics of his verse to a conclusion, with Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, a piece written in the maturity of his powers, and upon which he evidently bestowed peculiar attention. It was "occasioned", as owned by Swift, "by reading a Maxim in Rochefoucault" which states that "in the Adversity of our best Friends, we find something that doth not displease us".

"In all Distresses of our Friends
We first consult our private Ends,
While Nature kindly bent to ease us,
Points out some Circumstance to please us".

Things are here not so tangible as in his preceding poems. Swift shows his power of imagination by painting how his friends would mourn his death:

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85 cf. The rendering of the Latin Maxim given at the top of the poem, p. 496.
86 Ibid., p. 496.
87 Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, p. 496. Ll. 7-10.
"St. John himself will scarce forbear,
To bite his Pen, and drop a Tear.
The rest will give a Shrug and cry
I'm sorry; but we all must dye." 88

The best part of the poem contains, as has already been mentioned and quoted in the previous chapters, the scene of lamentations of his female friends over their cards, which will certainly amuse all as one of his happiest conversational pieces.

Of the poems of Swift, some of the most striking were composed in mature life, after his attainment of the deanery of St. Patrick; and it will be admitted that no one ever gave a more perfect example of the easy familiarity attainable in the English language. His readiness in rhyme is truly astonishing; the most uncommon associations of sounds coming to him as it were spontaneously, in words seemingly the best adapted to the occasion.

88 Ibid., p. 503, ll. 209-212.